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ABSTRACT

Concerns over the quality of education in the United States and the increasing demands of international competition have resulted in increased calls for the development and implementation of industry-based skill standards. A series of 22 pilot projects that were initiated by the National Skills Standard Board to strengthen the education-employment connection through industry-based skill standards demonstrated that traditional job analysis processes are effective in identifying sets of skills required for given jobs or occupations. However, concern was expressed regarding the failure of the skill components framework to reflect the broader, more professional roles of workers, and a professional model framework requiring integration of advanced generic skills with industry-related skills was proposed instead. Among the other maior concerns that have been raised regarding the feasibility of a national skills standards system are the following: extent to which local school personnel can adopt the numerous national, state, and local academic and industry skills standards being developed; need for teacher retraining; appropriateness of various assessment procedures; effectiveness of student evaluations; and difficulties in getting industries to support a certified skill standards system and working together to establish standards for occupations that overlap across industries. (Concluding this document is a 14-item annotated bibliography.) (MN)

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TRENDS AND ISSUES ALERTS
by Bettina Lankard Brown 1997
ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
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Skill Standards: Job Analysis Profiles Are Just the Beginning

Concern about the quality of education in the United States, the diminishing skills of workers, and the increasing demands of a competitive international economy has led to the establishment of the National Skills Standards Act of 1994. With a growing conviction that skills standards are needed to align the education system with the emerging, high-performance needs of the workplace, the National Skills Standard Board initiated 22 pilot projects designed to strengthen the connection between education and employment through the development and implementation of industry-based skill standards (short-term goal), and to advance innovation and reform in schools and the workplace (long-term goal).

In a review of the pilot projects' initial efforts, Bailey and Merritt (1995) note significant strides in accomplishing the short-term goal. All of the projects used traditional job analysis processes (mostly DACUM) to identify sets of skills required for given jobs or occupations. However, analysts contend that the skill components framework does not contribute to school and workplace reform in that it does not reflect the broader, more professional role of the worker.

In the skills components framework, workers are trained to perform specific tasks; they are not required to know when to perform the tasks and how those tasks relate to each other or to the final product. In the professional model framework, the focus is less on what the worker does and more on the functions of the generic job category—functions such as problem solving, reasoning, using judgment, and contributing ideas, which are significant in a high-performance workplace (ibid.).

The professional model framework requires the integration of vocational and academic education in that advanced generic skills such as those identified in the SCANS (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) are integrated with industry-related skills. To advance the professional model framework, vocational and academic teachers will need to work together in a more cohesive fashion to ensure skill integration.

A major concern about the feasibility of a national skills standards system that integrates skill standards into critical workplace functions is the extent to which local school personnel are able to adopt the numerous academic and industry skills standards being developed at the national, state, and local levels (Ananda et al. 1995). Questions regarding the need for teacher retraining, the appropriateness of various assessment procedures (e.g., tests, portfolios, job profiles, etc.), and effective student evaluations (e.g., those that consider varied student learning and performance styles) must be addressed.

From the viewpoint of industry, several obstacles threaten progress toward a certified skill standards system. According to Geber (1995), skills standards will never succeed unless companies are convinced that they have something to gain. It will be expensive for companies to implement and maintain a system of competency-based evaluation that requires the continual review and revision of standards to ensure that they reflect the current workplace. Getting people to work together across industries to establish standards for occupations that overlap and making sure the system is fair and nondiscriminatory are additional concerns (ibid.). That there is value in creating a system of national industry standards is not disputed, but achieving the long-term goal of reforming schools and the workplace will not be easily accomplished.

Print Resources

Ananda, S. M. et al. "Skills for Tomorrow's Workforce." *Policy Briefs,* no. 22. San Francisco: Far West Lab for Educational Research and Development, December 1995. (ED 392 132)

Two converging educational reform strategies have emerged: (1) to create a voluntary system of academic standards for K-12 students, and (2) to create a voluntary system of industry-skill standards for individuals planning to enter certain industries and occupations. The challenge facing policy makers is to determine how and to what degree academic and industry skill standards systems should be integrated.

Bailey, T., and Merritt, D. *Making Sense of Industry-Based Skill Standards.* Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1995. (ED 389 897)

The objectives and development of the skill standards movement were examined along with 22 pilot projects that were undertaken as part of an effort to promote the development of a national system of voluntary industry-based skill standards.

Ferguson, R. L. *Industry & Higher Education* 9, no. 4 (August 1995): 241-47.

Education and adult life/work are concurrent, not consecutive. To address this new paradigm, Work Keys provide a common language for education and business to prepare people for education and employment transitions. Work Keys components are job profiling, skills assessments, and targets for instruction.

Geber, B. "The Plan to Certify America." *Training* 32, no. 2 (February 1995): 39-42, 44.

The national skill standards project may take 10 years to complete and will be expensive to set up and maintain. Getting consensus from industry, unions, and educators

and ensuring checks for fairness and nondiscrimination pose challenges.

Hoachlander, G., and Rahn, M. "National Skill Standards: Everyone Agrees on the Destination. Getting There Is Another Story." ***Vocational Education Journal*** 69, no. 1 (January 1994): 20-22, 47.
Discusses the need for national skill standards and the problems associated with establishing them. Suggests tasks that must be completed: (1) reaching consensus on what constitutes an industry; (2) settling how specific the lists will be; (3) determining how to set standards; and (4) figuring out how to assess students and what certification signifies.

Hudelson, D. "The Standard Approach. Skill Certification on the Way; Is Vocational Education Ready?" ***Vocational Education Journal*** 68, no. 2 (February 1993): 32-34, 51.
Pressure from policy makers and industry and the drive for competitiveness are the impetus behind national industry skill standards, already in place in some industries and states. Obstacles include controversy over the cluster versus specific approach, union fears, and employer and school acceptance.

Losh, C. "National Skill Standards Projects: Their Influence on State & Local Technical Education." A paper presented at the American Vocational Association Convention, Denver, CO, December 1995. (ED 389 946)
Twenty-two projects were conducted to develop National Skill Standards over a 3-year period beginning in 1992. Since the parameters of skill standards have not been defined and the format and presentation process have not been standardized, there will be 22 conceptually different sets of skill standards to which the technical education community will be expected to respond.

Merritt, D. "A Conceptual Framework for Industry-Based Skill Standards." ***Centerfocus***, no. 11. Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, April 1996. (ED 392 989)
Two models of skill standards development and skill certification—the professional model and the skill components model—have been developed. These two models differ along with two critical dimensions—the conceptualization of skill and the role that workers play in the development and governance of the skill standards system.

Michigan State Council on Vocational Education. ***Standards and Assessment. A Working Paper.*** Lansing, MI: MSCOVE, 1996. (ED 393 981)
Proposes a direction and strategies for using a total quality management approach to develop and implement standards for evaluating vocational education students and assessing programs throughout Michigan. Discussed are the need for and role of skill standards, assessments, and certification along with strategies for implementing and building quality into a system of education for work.

Rabinowitz, S. N. "Beyond Testing: A Vision for an Ideal School-to-Work Assessment System." ***Vocational Education Journal*** 70, no. 3 (March 1995): 27-29, 52.
Flexible systems for assessing job readiness need to be used in conjunction with national skill standards projects. For example, the Career-Technical Assessment Program conducted by Far West Laboratory is a performance-based assessment and certification system that measures vocational program, generic workplace readiness, and foundation academic standards.

"The Test Makers: Accountability Requirements, Diverse Programs Fuel Markets for Assessment Materials." ***Vocational Education Journal*** 70, no. 3 (March 1995): 30-33.
Offers excerpts of current assessment methods in vocational-technical education taken from the 1994 report "Testing and Assessment in Vocational Education" prepared by the Office of Technology Assessment. Includes information on Work Keys and national skill standards in the United Kingdom.

Vocational Instructional Materials Laboratory. ***Job Profiling Guide: Results of the 1995 Job Profiling Part of the Ohio Vocational Competency Assessment Package.*** Columbus: Vocational Instructional Materials Lab, The Ohio State University, 1995. (ED 386 557)
Discusses the two assessment components of the OVCA package: the Occupational Competency Analysis Profiles, which assess students' occupational skills; and Work Keys, which measure students' applied academic skills. The second section describes the skills needed to achieve each level for each of the seven Work Keys academic skills. The third section provides results of the 1994-1995 job profiling for 39 occupations.

Wills, J. L. ***Voluntary Skill Standards and Certification. Skill Standards: A Primer.*** Washington, DC: Employment and Training Administration, 1995. (ED 383 887)
Provides basic information about the establishment and principal tasks of the National Skill Standards Board. Presented first is the rationale for a system of voluntary standards and the NSSB. The development of skill standards is discussed in the context of recent changes in education and training and the National Education Goals.

Resource Organization

National Skills Standards Board, 1441 L Street, NW, Suite 9000, Washington, DC 20005-3512; 202/254-8628; fax: 202/254-8646; e-mail: marshall@nssb.org; World Wide Web: http://www.nssb.org/nssb/index.html

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